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WASHINGTON POST  
20 MARCH 1983

# Pentagon Superweapon: The Hair-Raising Briefer

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By Fred Kaplan

DEEP INSIDE THE PENTAGON, far behind those scenes occupied by the secretary of defense and his entourage of deputy and assistant secretaries, lie several separate, almost entirely unknown subcultures. In some of these specialized communities are the anonymous analysts who puzzle over their endless calculations; in others, the nuclear gurus who dream up doctrines and warfighting strategies; in still others, the professional briefers.

This last group is hardly the least important. Its inhabitants are commissioned to sell the wares of the powers that be. The dazzle or dreariness of their presentations can mean the difference between a weapon sold or rejected, a new idea advanced or squelched, a portrait of the Soviet threat embraced as truth or dismissed as flight of fantasy.

Standing out among these briefers, in a class all his own, is a soft-spoken, wiry, increasingly frail 54-year-old photo-intelligence analyst named John T. Hughes.

Few have heard of John Hughes, but in the coming months we're all likely to hear a great deal. For if a group of hawks on Capitol Hill get their way, Hughes will be unveiled as the secret superweapon that could produce political victory on the side of those trying to sell Ronald Reagan's and Caspar Weinberger's \$274 billion defense budget to Congress and the American public. It may be an impossible mission, but if any one man can accomplish it, John Hughes may be the man.

Possibly without knowing it, you've heard of Hughes already. In October 1962, as the special assistant to the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Hughes examined a collection of overhead U-2 photographs and concluded that the Soviets were placing nuclear missiles in Cuba.

In February 1963, 3½ months after the Cuban missile crisis was resolved, Hughes went on nationwide television for 90 minutes, at the request of then Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, and, with his pointer aimed at dozens of photos flashed before a large screen, demonstrated that the Russians had indeed removed those missiles from Cuba.

Nineteen years later, in March 1982, as

deputy director of the DIA, a post he has held for the last 12 years, he appeared at a State Department press briefing, and — at the request of then Secretary of State Alexander Haig, who was hellbent on proving Soviet and Cuban infiltration in El Salvador — showed a set of overhead photographs revealing Soviet and Cuban influence in neighboring Nicaragua. As evidence, he pointed out a couple dozen (1950s-vintage) Soviet tanks, a few Soviet antiaircraft guns and helicopters, "Soviet-style obstacle course," a "Soviet-style physical training area" and new military garisons "built along Cuban design."

But the product of John Hughes that the hawks on the Hill want to share with the rest of us is a briefing called "Soviet Military Trends and Capabilities." It's an updated version of a briefing that Hughes has been delivering around town, including to Congress' Armed Services Committees, every year for nearly a decade.

This briefing is classified at a level above Top Secret. It lasts three to four hours, with only a short break for breath. It consists of literally hundreds of overhead satellite and spyplane photographs of every military installation and weapon in the U.S.S.R., painting a frightening picture of Soviet military might, of a nation that appears to be brimming over with practically nothing but arms.

Several Republicans are urging President Reagan to declassify portions of the briefing and show it to the public. One look at those pictures, they say, and the resistance to the Reagan-Weinberger defense budget will crumble at once.

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